

BY EVAN JACOBS



THE FORGOTTEN COMPUTER

A decorative title box with a hand-drawn, ornate border featuring floral and scrollwork motifs. The text inside is centered and reads "THE HISTORY OF THE VINTAGE ROSE ANTIQUE SHOP". The background of the page is decorated with faint spider webs.

THE HISTORY OF THE VINTAGE ROSE ANTIQUE SHOP

The story begins with a sorcerer named Ervin Legend. He had a talent for making money. While traveling, Ervin bought items all over the world. He would have called himself a collector. Others might say hoarder. Once he grew tired of things, he sold them for a profit. "One man's junk is another man's treasure," he used to say.

Eventually, Ervin wanted to settle down. His home was in Scarecrow, California. But he needed somewhere to put all of his things. Ervin opened the Vintage Rose Antique Shop in 1912. It was a place to keep his collections. His wife, Visalia, inspired the shop's name. She loved roses and kept them in vases all over the shop. "Roses mask the smell of old things," she would say.

After the shop opened, Ervin kept traveling. He collected pieces to sell from all over. In 1949, Ervin and Visalia went to Cairo, Egypt. While there, the couple disappeared. Nobody knows what happened to them. Some say Ervin's love of sorcery might have been to blame. He may have looked into something he shouldn't have.

Family members took over the shop. None were quite like Ervin, though. Without his passion, the business began to fail. His sister believed it was cursed.



In 1979, the Legends put the shop up for sale. Rose Myers bought it. She was odd, like Ervin. Her passion for old things was like his. "Everything has a story," she would say, with a twinkle in her eye. From a young age, Rose had looked for bargains. She would resell things for a profit. Buying the Vintage Rose was her dream come true. The place was old. It was filled with odd treasures. Plus, Rose was part of the name of the store. It seemed like this was meant to be.

Rose ran the shop for 40 years. When she passed away, it closed. The business had been left to her nephew, Evan Stewart. He was Rose's closest living relative. The Stewart family moved to Scarecrow. They reopened the shop in 2019.

Today, the shop still holds many treasures. Collectors come from all over. Some have purchased these mysterious relics. Are they magical? Do they watch over the store? We may never find out. Or will we?

IT STILL WORKS

But I answered all the questions,” I plead. “Why can’t I show everyone the answers on my mainframe?”

Mrs. Sanchez, my eighth-grade history teacher, turns to look at me. “Zach Vo, you know you don’t have a mainframe. You also know the real problem here. Other students use school tablets. I can mirror their work onto the digital board. However, you’ve chosen to use an old laptop. There’s no way I can connect to it. Don’t worry. You’ll still get full credit for the assignment.”

I turn my laptop toward Mrs. Sanchez. “Maybe I could just hold this up in front of the class.”

Some students giggle at that suggestion.

Mrs. Sanchez shakes her head. “That’s not necessary, Zach. It would be too difficult for students to see what’s on your screen. You can still participate. Just raise your hand to answer as we go over the questions now.”

Feeling deflated, I turn my laptop back around. I do most of my schoolwork on this computer. It's big, black, and very heavy. But I love it.

I know it's not really a mainframe. It would be impossible for me to carry one of those anywhere. Some have been known to take up two floors of a building. Calling my laptop a mainframe just makes me happy. It's like a pet name. The idea of holding something that powerful in my hands is thrilling. My computer may be old, but it's still going strong.

Most people think I'm different. I agree. It's something I take pride in. On the outside, I seem like any other eighth grader here at Scarecrow Middle School. My hair is black, straight, and neatly cut. Usually, I comb it to the side. T-shirts, hoodies, and jeans are my favorite clothes to wear.

My opinion on technology is the biggest difference between other students and me. I am not a fan of the new stuff. Tablets, smartphones, the internet, AI, and anything like those things annoy me. I'm not looking forward to high school next year. The principal I have now lets me use my mainframe. But I think it will be a different story at Scarecrow High. What I try to avoid is going to be forced upon me even more there.

A reason why new tech bothers me is the fact it's always changing. There's one new item after another. The cycle never ends. People constantly rush to buy the latest device. What happens to all the old tech that still works? Where does it go? Doesn't that waste hurt the environment?

Plus, my laptop from the 1990s works just fine. I can do all my work on it. The machine has a floppy disk drive. I simply insert the wonderful piece of plastic and metal called a floppy disk into the slot in my laptop. Then I save my work to the disk. After that, I can take the disk wherever I go. My schoolwork is moved to and from my computer that way. Emailing my work to my teachers is possible from home. But I would have to use the internet connection at my house. Thankfully, some computers at the school library are older. They still have disk drives. The computers there are connected to the internet too. It's fine with me to just email from there.

I've always felt this way about technology. It wasn't until middle school that it became a problem. The school wants students to use tablets for everything.

Even my parents would prefer that I use newer tech. They grew up in a rural part of Vietnam. It was

hard to access the latest tech there. In the U.S., they don't have this problem. My parents think I should appreciate that more.

Just then, a girl sitting next to me named Maribel whispers to me. "Why do you have to be such a weirdo?"

Maribel is one of the tallest and loudest girls in school. She always argues with people. Everyone backs down because she's so pushy and intimidating. As usual, her long dark hair is draped over her red shirt. I guess red is her favorite color. Every day, she wears at least one thing in some shade of red.

"I'm not," I whisper back. "The work on my main—"

"Just use a school tablet," she continues. "Everyone else does. You always use your laptop, paper, and pencils. Technology makes everything easier."

"I'm doing this for the planet," I say. "Remember—"

"For the planet?" Maribel rolls her eyes. "Paper and pencils come from cutting down trees. Duh!"

The bell rings.

Perfect timing, I think. The last thing I want is to get into a long argument with Maribel.

Everyone gets up but me. The first place they go is Mrs. Sanchez's phone cubby. It's where students

have to put their devices before class starts. Another teacher at my school, Mrs. Hartsfield, came up with this idea. I've heard she's very strict. She also teaches eighth-grade history. I'm glad I don't have her class. What she started in her own classroom is now a schoolwide policy. Every teacher enforces the phone cubby rule.

Mrs. Sanchez oversees the students at the cubby. "No rushing or pushing. I assure you, your devices haven't gone anywhere."

I pick up my backpack and laptop. Maribel shakes her head at me. She waits with everyone else to get her phone.

But with no phone, I don't have to wait. I'm on my way to my next class. As I leave the room, I smile smugly at Maribel.

BEST FRIEND

It's after school. My buddy, Aaron, and I are walking home.

He glances over at me. "Dude, why can't you just be normal? Use modern devices like everyone else."

"Normal?" I ask indignantly. Then I hike my backpack over my shoulder. The backpack is very heavy with my laptop inside. I have a hard time using only one strap like most students do. But I always try for a while. Finally, I decide to slide my other arm through the backpack's unused strap.

"Yeah." Aaron holds up his phone. "Try a smartphone. And the school gives you a tablet. It's free! There's no good reason not to use it, Zach."

Aaron starts tapping his phone's screen with his thumbs. I figure he's probably playing a game or something.

I don't know much about cell phone games. But I've heard that people like them. Vintage video games are

what I play. They require older consoles. My parents have offered to buy me a newer gaming system a few times. That doesn't even remotely interest me.

Aaron tries to get me to use newer technology all the time. My aversion to it bothers him. But he's my only real friend. I talk to other students at school every once in a while. They're nice, but none of them want to hang out with me. Only Aaron does.

He's tall, kind of muscular, and known for being tough. This is probably why Maribel doesn't mess with me as often anymore. Although Aaron and I don't always agree, I'm grateful for his friendship.

I glance at him. "You're sounding like Maribel now. She was arguing with me about my laptop today. As a society, we're constantly using new technology. Everybody just tosses out their old stuff. What effect will that have on the—"

"Yeah, yeah." Aaron sounds annoyed. "You always say you're trying to help the environment. Have you ever researched that, Zach? Probably not. Because then you'd have to use the internet."

I shake my head. "Nope. I'm not a user."

The internet is not all bad. I get online when I have to. My laptop is so old that it can only connect to a

dial-up modem. That's why it takes me longer than most to access the internet. But it can still be done, if needed.

Aaron laughs. "Why aren't you a *user*? There's so much information on the internet. Do some online research. If you did, you could probably find a better argument for not using new technology. People like Maribel might leave you alone."

"Not sure about that." I adjust my backpack. "My old mainframe works just fine. I can do everything on it."

"No, you can't. You'll never connect to anyone with that thing. Nobody uses dial-up, man. And you really need to stop calling your laptop a mainframe. That's not what it is."

"Do you know the history of mainframes?" I ask. "The ones used today have so much power. I think it's funny to call my laptop that. It's old, huge, and powerful, just like a mainframe."

Aaron chuckles. "You say all of that about your laptop like it's a good thing." He holds up his phone. "This has just as much power as your laptop or more. But you know what this can do that your computer can't? Play the newest version of *Robo's War*."

That game is part of the *Clan Castles* universe. It's a cell phone spinoff of the popular video gaming series.

“So what?” I ask, smiling. “I can play the original *Clan Castles* on my console at home.”

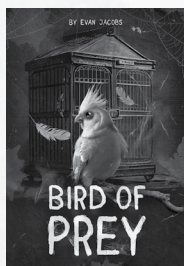
“Hey, losers!” a girl shouts behind us.

Oh no, I think nervously. Is Maribel following me?

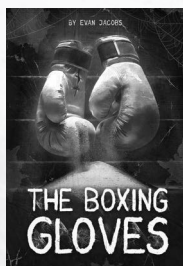
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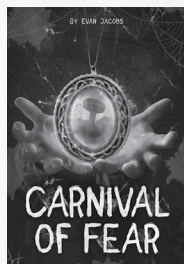
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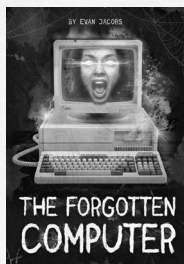
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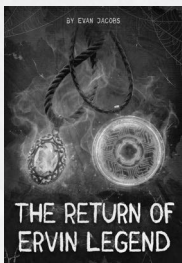
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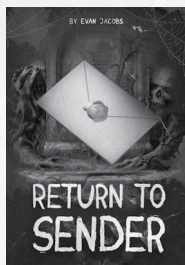
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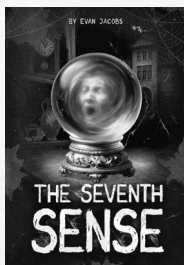
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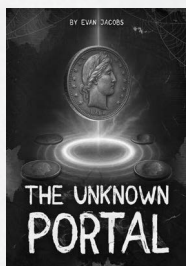
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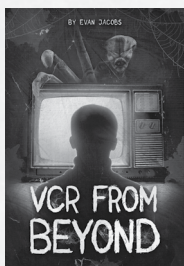
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VINTAGE ROSE MYSTERIES

THE FORGOTTEN COMPUTER

Zach has zero interest in new technology but loves any kind that's retro and clunky. When he finds a mysterious, old-school computer at Vintage Rose, he thinks he has scored the ultimate gem. But this machine is hiding secrets—and someone, or something, doesn't want to be forgotten. Can Zach outsmart what he has powered on before it's too late?

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